

Finding Salvador Dalí in Modern Divination Cards
By Shelby Schultz

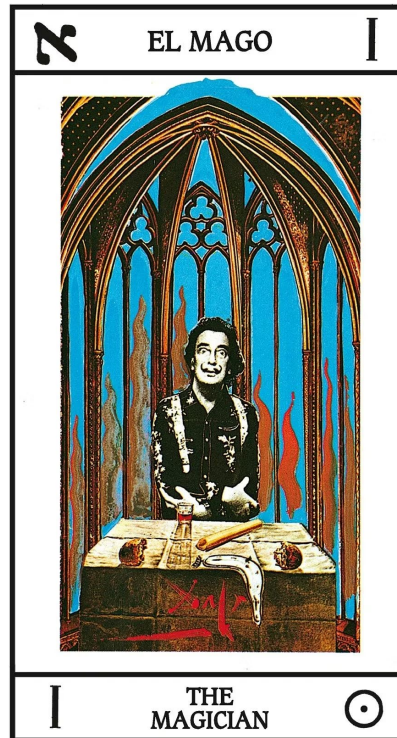


Figure 1. *Dalí Tarot: The Magician*

In 1910, the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot deck, published in London, became the most popular deck of the twentieth century with its beautiful artwork, and detailed storytelling. As the rise of spiritualism grew and more people reached for tarot cards to answer their questions, there was a resulting boom in the 1970s.¹ Tarot cards started to become present in the market with new, interesting designs and elaborate storytelling. Then in 1984, Salvador Dalí published his own tarot deck that forever changed the world of tarot. A famous artist had shown that the tarot deck could be a new form of media and inspiration for household artists. He opened the door for artists to create their own custom tarot decks to represent themselves and tell their own unique stories. Today, thousands of different tarot and oracle card decks are available at local bookstores, and more are published every year. Within these decks, inspiration from Salvador Dalí can be found.

While tarot cards and Salvador Dalí might sound like an odd combination, Dalí had been accustomed to tarot cards thanks to his wife, Gala, for many years. Ian Gibson reports in his book *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí* two documented times that Gala used her cards to assist in business decisions and “predicting” the future. The first mention of tarot was in 1930 when Dalí and Gala were in Paris. Gala’s tarot cards were said to predict a letter arriving from a mysterious man. Sure enough, shortly after Dalí received a letter asking him to be part of an exhibition at the Goeman Gallery.² Gala also claimed that the tarot cards informed her about an upcoming European war in 1938.³ While there are no reports that Dalí ever picked up a deck of tarot cards and did his own readings, it is possible that he knew the meanings and symbolism associated with the cards.

In 1973, during a time when tarot was on an all-time rise, Dalí was commissioned to create seventy-eight tarot card illustrations by producer Albert Broccoli. The commission was for the James Bond film, *Live and Let Die*.⁴ One of the main characters, a woman named Solitaire used tarot cards to foretell the future. Dalí, already known in Hollywood for his previous projects with Walt Disney and Alfred Hitchcock, became the perfect choice for Broccoli. Dalí would bring good publicity to the film and having a surrealist artist design the tarot deck would make the cards unique. Unfortunately, Dalí was not known for being a punctual artist and would take extensive time to complete projects. Due to this, Broccoli ended up dropping him from the project after he did not complete the tarot deck within the contracted period. After Broccoli backed out on the tarot cards, an American publisher named Lyle Stewart reached out to Dalí and continued the commission of the cards. Again, Dalí failed to finish the cards within the contracted time, but this time Lyle Stewart took legal action against Dalí. \$300,000 was frozen in Dalí’s First National Bank Account and settlement talks began. The settlement ended with Dalí signing 17,500 blank sheets of paper that the publishers were allowed to do with as they pleased.⁵

After two failed attempts of finishing the tarot cards, it would make sense for him to give up on the project and never return. However, Dalí continued the fight for his cards, and

about ten years after the start of the project, he got the rights back and published the tarot cards through a local Catalan playing cards printer in 1983-84.⁶ Dalí could not have chosen a better time to publish the cards. Starting in the 1970s, there was a sudden boom in occult interests due to the 1960's counterculture becoming mainstreamed and reinforced with the publishing of new tarot decks and books.⁷ Now, more artists were developing their own tarot decks because there was such a strong tradition of symbolism associated with tarot that made it easy for artists to adapt with their own interests. This made Dalí's tarot deck unique because it is a combination of Dalí's artistic genius, a strong understanding of the traditional tarot symbols, and a rich source of art history. Almost every card includes collage images Dalí pulled from classical art books that create a beautiful integration of classical artwork and modern art of the 20th century.



Figure 2. *Dalí Tarot*

Dalí became the first well-known artist to create a tarot deck and was quickly followed by others.⁸ Today, tens of thousands of different tarot decks can be found on the market. A quick search on Etsy or a trip to the local bookshop greets guests with hundreds of choices in hundreds of styles. Decks based on cats, artists, gardening, astrology, and more are now

available thanks to artists in the 70s and 80s displaying their own ideas and styles. Now multiple decks on the market include Dalí imagery and inspiration that highlight how Dalí's artistic legacy reaches beyond the fine art world.

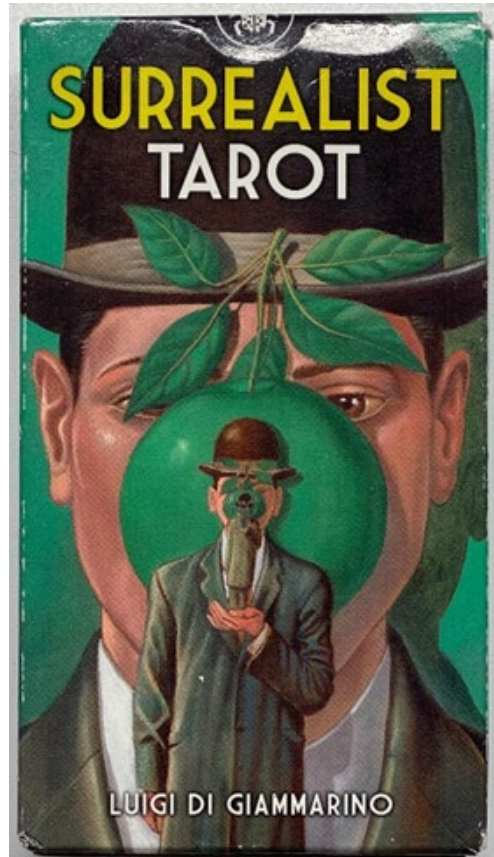


Figure 3. Luigi di Giammarino, *Surrealist Tarot*

The Surrealist Tarot' deck created by Luigi di Giammarino is a beautiful tarot deck that encapsulates Surrealism and surrealist symbols into every card in the 78-card deck. Some cards are fully related to specific artists like Magritte and others combine multiple artists' works to create new and creative surrealist images. Giammarino is an Italian cartoonist and illustrator born in L'Aquila in 1959 and has spent his artistic career working on comic books, animations and published three tarot decks.⁹ His last deck, "The Surrealist Tarot," was published on September 8, 2021, proving there is still a love and fascination with the surrealist artists that continues to influence modern artists.



Figure 4. "The Devil" card from *Surrealist Tarot*.

Multiple cards in the set draw direct inspiration from Dalí and his artwork. The most obviously Dalí-influenced card would have to be The Devil. The Devil card in a tarot reading represents reevaluating the people and material things around the reader. The Devil card tells what is true and what is false in a person's life.¹⁰ This card from the Surrealist Tarot deck depicts a self-portrait of Dalí coming out of a snail's body that is suspended by crutches over a Dalinian landscape. Coming out of Dalí's head are two devil-like horns made up of rhino horns that are disintegrating and breaking apart.



Figure 5. Salvador Dalí, *The Atavism of Twilight*, 1933.

Collection of Kunstmuseum, Bern. ©Salvador Dalí. Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí (Artists Rights Society), 2023.

Underneath this horrific creature is a woman holding one of the crutches supporting Dalí's horn. In front of the woman is her husband, now dead and skeletal while still holding his hat over his crotch as a wheelbarrow protrudes from his head. These two figures are pulled straight out of Dalí's painting *The Atavisms of Twilight*, 1933 (figure 5), but now the woman's arm is outstretched and the man is on his knees. Dalí was obsessed with Millet's *Angelus* painting so it is very fitting that Giammarino used one of Dalí's depictions of the couple in one of his cards. Not only are his paintings referenced in this work, but the famous Phillippe Halsman photograph taken in the 1950s also inspires the portrait of Dalí. What is interesting is Giammarino depicts Dalí as much older and rougher looking in the card. Is he trying to replicate the texture of the snail's body into Dalí's face, or is he purposely depicting Dalí as older and withering away?



Figure 6. The Devil (*Dali Tarot*)

What is intriguing is viewing Giammarino's The Devil card next to the correlating card in Dalí's tarot deck (*figure 6*). At first glance, they look nothing alike. Dalí's card depicts a lioness-like figure jumping off a grassy plateau while holding a large butterfly wand. Upon a closer look, the rhino horns extend off the leg of the figure and are almost a direct match to the rhino horns seen atop Dalí's head in the "Surrealist Tarot". Also, in Giammarino's card, in the bottom left of the background, is that same green, grassy plateau. Did Giammarino take inspiration directly from Dalí's tarot cards? We cannot be sure but it is very interesting to see similar symbolism and particularly Dalí symbolism in both corresponding cards from two separate decks. It is possible that Giammarino took direct influence from Dalí's tarot deck when creating some of the cards for his own deck. He obviously took direct reference from other works and media used by many surrealist artists.

In the guidebook that accompanies his tarot deck, Giammorino includes many references to surrealist artists and poets including quotes and created titles for each card that directly relate to an artist or artist's work. The quotes do not always match the inspiration of the cards. For example, the title and description for The Devil card are "XV- The Devil- A Logical Devil. Meeting with the shadow. All things always hide another example of themselves. "No one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modeled, constructed, or invented, except in order to actually get out of hell." (Antonin Artaud)."¹¹ A substantial quote, from a surrealist poet, directly references the meaning of The Devil card of reevaluating relationships with people and objects around the reader.¹² Surprisingly that very Dalí inspired card is not accompanied by a Dalí quote but this trend continues throughout the guidebook. The Dalí quote, "Heaven lies precisely in the middle of the chest of a man who has faith," is associated with The Star card, a card that corresponds with arriving at a happier time in one's life with harmony and inspiration. The Dalí quote is a perfect companion to this card because if the reader follows whatever they have faith in, this will lead them to a happier and more fulfilling life. This is a creative way of using quotes in a way that will have more impact on the reader. Even if the quote does not match the surrealist artist, the card is showing.



Figure 7. "9 of Wands" card from the *Surrealist Tarot*

Another beautiful Dalí inspired card that Giammarino created is the *Nine of Wands*. The card is an almost seamless integration of Dalí paintings: *Swans Reflecting Elephants*, 1937 and *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonitions of Civil War*, 1936. The focal point of the card is the swans and elephants reproduced from the original double-image painting (figure 8). Yet, Giammarino changes the design by giving the elephants the famous mosquito legs so that they now tower over the desolate landscape while also giving the elephants only nine legs to relate back to the card name. The creature from *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans* is entangled with the swans and elephants with a hand sticking out of the left side and a large bent leg on the right (figure 9). The bottom of the card includes the rest of the "body" from *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans* but the second arm of the creature has been severed and is lying on the desolate ground. This change seems to have been a conscious choice by Giammarino to relate the art more to the meaning of the card. The Nine

of Wands represents courage and strength in fulfillment. Hardships and oppositions have triumphed over and the reader has grown stronger.¹³ In the card, the elephants and swans seem to have triumphed over and perhaps survived an attack by the creature now disassembled on the ground. The way Giammarino combined two drastically different Dalí works is so impressive. It shows the care and dedication that he has for the artist as well as his own artistic creativity.



Figure 8. Salvador Dalí, *Swans Reflecting Elephants*, 1937
Private Collection. ©Salvador Dalí. Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí (Artists Rights Society), 2023.



Figure 9. Salvador Dalí, *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonitions of Civil War*, 1936
Collection of Philadelphia Museum of Art. ©Salvador Dalí. Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí
(Artists Rights Society), 2023.

The Nine of Wands unfortunately does not have any connections back to Dalí's deck. Nevertheless, it does have an interesting description in the guidebook. Giammarino describes the card as a "Postcard from Golconda."¹⁴ Interestingly enough, Golconda is a city located in India. This information makes a new connection with the country of India and the double-image elephants in Dalí's work. Giammarino also includes the description, "Marriage between the Heaven of personal intuition and the Earth of everyday life"¹⁵ for the card. This description is somewhat difficult to interpret and highlights that the guidebook for the Surrealist Tarot is just as thought-provoking as the individual cards.

There is no doubt that a lot of time and effort went into creating this beautiful deck of tarot cards. At the beginning of the guidebook, Giammarino says that the deck was designed and produced by "following the same techniques adopted by the Surrealists"¹⁶ and because

of that the deck has a more dreamlike and poetic quality. Even the quotes used by other surrealist figures are uncommon quotes. Giammarino took time to find quotes that he felt were profound and fitting for his artwork. This deck shows the influence that Surrealism and Salvador Dalí continue to have on the modern world by combining well-known pieces of Dalí's art with Dalínian symbolism and fellow surrealist figures from his time. Giammarino's deck is the most complex and detailed tarot deck related to surrealism. It is dripping with symbolism, references, and appreciation. Even if someone is not interested in tarot, these cards are easily accessible works of art that can be enjoyed by any lover of surrealism.



Figure 10. *Art Oracles*

Similar to tarot cards are oracle cards. Oracle cards use a similar format with a detailed card representing a phrase that offers the reader advice. Oracle cards are a more simplified version of tarot that does not require the memorization of symbolism and meaning to “read” the cards. Oracle cards have been just as popular in the modern day and are now pulling from pop culture and art for their designs to entice possible readers. As of 2018, a rather popular set of oracle cards called “Art Oracles: Creative & Life Inspiration from the Great Artists” was created by Katya Tylevich and Mikkell Sommer. This set of cards includes fifty artists drawn by Sommers and three separate lines of advice at the bottom of the cards

written by Tylevich. In this deck, there is one card associated with Salvador Dalí. The illustration shows a waist-up portrait of Dalí standing in a landscape similar to that of many of his surrealist paintings (*figure 10*). Sommer also included ants at the top right corner and a melting hourglass rather than a melting watch. Dalí is remembered for his depictions of melting pocket watches but here Sommer had a little fun with that imagery and made it an hourglass, a popular object to tell time but not the object someone would associate with the artist. Dalí is depicted with a rather impossibly large mustache, which highlights this deck's more fun and playful feel.

At the bottom of the card is the advice written by Tylevich. She makes a note on the back of the included booklet which states that all the advice in the deck is inspired by and not directly quoted from the artists. The advice, while being short, really does feel like something Dalí would say to someone who asked for his advice on life, work, or inspiration. For example, the card's response to an inspirational question is "Being Dalí is inspiration enough".¹⁷ What a perfect response! The Art Oracles deck displays Dalí's legacy in a fun and whimsical way. It is not meant to be serious and Dalí would have loved it.

Tarot cards, oracle cards, and modern occultism are not the first place someone looks to find Salvador Dalí, but his legacy is so far-reaching thanks to his adaptability and his desire to try so many things in his lifetime. People today are using his art and symbolism to create very elaborate and detailed tarot cards. Others are creating oracle cards that are more playful and appealing to a broader audience that may not have as much interest in the occult but know of these famous artists and find the advice given humorous.

When people think about Dalí, they picture *The Persistence of Memory*. Mustache and melting clock merchandise is found in any museum gift shop around the world whether that museum has a Dalí piece or not. Nevertheless, in the modern day, Dalí's influence can be found in small niches thanks to his impactful artwork and fascinating personality that continues to attract thousands of new art lovers a year. The publishing of Dalí's tarot deck in

the 1980s opened the door for well-known and household artists to take a practice that had very little variety for hundreds of years and expand on it exponentially. While only two decks are discussed in this paper with very direct correlations to Dalí, there are many more on the market that are surrealist-inspired.

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- ¹ Alexander, Skye. 2017. *Modern Witchcraft Guide to Tarot: Your Complete Guide to Understanding the Tarot*. Adams Media Corporation. p 25-27
- ² Gibson, Ian. 1998. *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí*. New York: W. W. Norton Company. p 297
- ³ Gibson, Ian. 1998. *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí*. New York: W. W. Norton Company. p 439
- ⁴ Cronin, Brian. 2022. "Did Salvador Dali Almost Make a James Bond Movie Prop?" CBR. June 30, 2022. <https://www.cbr.com/salvador-dali-james-bond-movie-prop-tarot-cards/>.
- ⁵ Gibson, Ian. 1998. *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí*. New York: W. W. Norton Company. p 619
- ⁶ Fiebig, Johannes, and Salvador Dalí. 2019. *Dalí - Tarot*. Köln Taschen. p 10
- ⁷ Jones, Josh. 2016. "The Tarot Card Deck Designed by Salvador Dalí | Open Culture." Open Culture. December 28, 2016. <https://www.openculture.com/2016/12/the-tarot-card-deck-designed-by-salvador-dali.html>.
- ⁸ Fiebig, Johannes, and Salvador Dalí. 2019. *Dalí - Tarot*. Köln Taschen. p 10
- ⁹ Giammarino, Luigi Di. 2016. "About." Luigi Di Giammarino. July 4, 2016. <http://www.luigidigiammarino.com/about/>.
- ¹⁰ Alexander, Skye. 2017. *MODERN WITCHCRAFT GUIDE to TAROT: Your Complete Guide to Understanding the Tarot*. Adams Media Corporation. p 190.
- ¹¹ Giammarino, Luigi Di. 2021. *Surrealist Tarot*. Lo Scarabeo. p 8.
- ¹² Alexander, Skye. 2017. *MODERN WITCHCRAFT GUIDE to TAROT: Your Complete Guide to Understanding the Tarot*. Adams Media Corporation. p 190.
- ¹³ Alexander, Skye. 2017. *MODERN WITCHCRAFT GUIDE to TAROT: Your Complete Guide to Understanding the Tarot*. Adams Media Corporation. p 76-77.
- ¹⁴ Giammarino, Luigi Di. 2021. *Surrealist Tarot*. Lo Scarabeo. p 12.
- ¹⁵ Giammarino, Luigi Di. 2021. *Surrealist Tarot*. Lo Scarabeo. p 12.
- ¹⁶ Giammarino, Luigi Di. 2021. *Surrealist Tarot*. Lo Scarabeo. p 4
- ¹⁷ Tylevich, Katya, and Mikkel Sommer. 2017. *Art Oracles*. Laurence King Publishing Ltd.

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